

Why SB 425 is bad policy and should be opposed

For the Montana House Committee on Fish, Wildlife and Parks

Montana Trout Unlimited

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- Montana FWP did not support the hatchery when it was proposed in 1999. At the time the agency could not identify any critical need for the facility, and the agency made clear it was afraid the hatchery would result in a shift of money from existing needs.
- When the 1999 Legislature agreed to authorize the hatchery, it did so only because the proponents promised the facility would never need general license dollars or matching federal money. The proponents, warmwater anglers, promised to fund future O and M using revenue from a warmwater stamp, which the 1999 Legislature subsequently approved.
- FWP has not clearly identified why the full capacity of the hatchery, which proponents agree was overbuilt under the approving eye of FWP, is suddenly necessary and why it must be funded only by using alternate sources of revenue.
- The hatchery should not be funded using general license dollars because its original authorization and SB 425 still make it clear this is not a standard state hatchery. Its production capacity by law is to be used first and foremost for production of warmwater species. Therefore, the Legislature and FWP have agreed to limit the agency's flexibility for use of this hatchery. The only reason SB 425 includes language authorizing limited use of the hatchery for some trout production, is so that FWP can justify using money for O and M from general license dollars and matching funds.
- SB 425 eliminates the warmwater stamp, which is a guaranteed source of funding that has been available for 10 years – the very source of funding that was a condition of the Legislature originally approving construction of the facility.
- **There is an alternative to SB 425:** Do not pass the bill, and direct angling groups to spend the next interim discussing funding alternatives, once FWP has better expressed what its statewide hatchery production needs are, as well as its overall fishery management objectives. This is not dissimilar to what the Legislature did in 2007 to resolve issues over bridge access. **There is no pressing need to rush into a new funding commitment for this hatchery at this time.** Funding is currently available from the warmwater stamp account to run the hatchery at its existing level until the next legislative session.